

## Rogue by HashtagLEH

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**Characters:** Billy Hargrove, Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Robin Buckley, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

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**Summary:**

“You won’t be building *anything* with Steve,” Billy snarled at the thing, who looked up at him with amusement. “Get *out*!”

Steve’s face stretched into a grin – too big, too unnatural, too thin – and black began to snake along his veins, bringing them out in stark relief against his face, his arms, his legs. He looked like a disease brought to life.

*"No,"* Steve said, and his eyes went black, the lights flashing like a strobe light around them.

# Rogue

## Author's Note:

I worked at this installment for a while, and I'm not 100% content with it, but if I kept going I would keep finding things to change and it would never be posted, so here you are. Hope you like it!

Steve woke up to someone poking him in the center of his forehead. He flinched away, feeling sluggish as he opened his eyes. Everything was blurry above him, like he was seeing things underwater. His head ached and everything was too bright.

"Dingus, are you sick?" Robin demanded, her face swimming into view a moment later, looking half concerned and half annoyed, like she wasn't sure which one was going to take over.

He blinked at her, turning the question over in his mind.

"No," his mouth said. "Just feeling off."

"Yeah, you're probably about five minutes from hypothermia, so 'feeling off' would make sense," she snorted, and Steve realized that he was in the walk-in freezer, buckets of ice cream labeled with the Scoops Ahoy logo sitting all around him. He'd apparently been sleeping there, for how long he didn't know. He didn't even remember getting to work.

"C'mon," Robin said, grabbing his hand and yanking him to his feet. He stumbled a little before finding his feet; he felt numb all over. "You can warm up by mopping the floors while I sling ice cream."

*The tentacle was large and slimy, with claws on the end. It released its hold on his leg, snapping up to attach itself to his face before he could move to get up and get away. He struggled against the painful sucking sensation against his face, fighting to get away.*

*But it was pointless.*

Steve snapped back into the here and now with a shudder it was

impossible to echo through his body. Everything he felt or did was just in his mind, while his body was controlled by someone else. *Something* else.

Steve followed Robin blankly out of the freezer, going to the closet with the cleaning supplies while the girl went back to the front to serve customers. He stared at the shelves in front of him, with bleach and Windex and various other chemicals sitting on them, the mop bucket idling on the floor off to the side. He tried to remember which one he was supposed to use to clean the floors. He felt like he was watching a movie spoken in another language; things were familiar, and he could kind of follow along, but the specifics were fuzzy and lost in translation so that he felt like he didn't really know what was going on, after all.

*He felt the thing snake into his veins, this shadow that held intelligence and pure hatred. It felt cold, but not like any cold he'd felt before. It felt like the time he had gotten his tongue stuck to a pole outside in January on a dare from Tommy – but it went all through his body as the monster settled inside.*

He wanted to tell someone. He felt very alone. But he couldn't risk Robin, especially when she knew nothing about all of this. He didn't know what this monster was planning to do with him, if he was just a host like Will had been or if there was something far worse in store. He couldn't risk anything, couldn't risk being made into a spy like Will had been.

*William...* A deep voice purred in his head, accompanied by a foreign feeling of delight and vindictiveness. Images flashed over his mind's eye too fast for Steve to comprehend, but the feeling and intent behind them was identifiable enough that Steve knew this monster wanted nothing good with its previous host.

*You stay the fuck away from those kids,* Steve thought furiously.

He didn't get any words back, just a feeling of dark amusement and a sensation like he was being shoved away. He felt like he was spinning, like he was on his strongest weed while he had the flu, and his mind went hazy enough that he felt like he was floating, uncaring of what happened around him.

He could do nothing but stare as his hand reached out without his own consent, grabbing the bottle of bleach off the shelf and removing the lid with deft movements, before raising it to his lips and tipping his head back to swallow.

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Steve came to awareness again some indeterminate amount of time later when he heard Dustin at the front of the store.

*He got back yesterday*, he thought vaguely, before he felt a renewed sense of horror at what the monster possessing him might do to the earnestly loyal kid. He had to stay away – he *couldn't* go greet him like he wanted to, not having seen him the entire month while he'd been away at camp.

He felt a strange sensation in his head, like the monster was flicking quickly through files, and a moment later he had the foreign feeling of malicious pleasure. Somehow, he knew immediately what the monster was going to do.

*No, no, no!* Steve protested, even as he felt his face form an imposter's smile, and he jumped forward to slam the door open that would take him to the front of the shop.

"Henderson!" he exclaimed, and he hoped that Dustin would think something was weird because he used his last name. But Dustin only laughed and pointed at him, looking delighted to see him.

"Henderson! He's back!" Steve said this time to Robin, who looked at him with a raised eyebrow, unimpressed.

"I'm back!" Dustin echoed. "You got the job!"

"I got the job!" Steve echoed, and went in to exchange the handshake that he and Dustin had created right before the younger boy had left for camp. Within his head, Steve stewed angrily at the monster using his body, *his* memories, to seem totally normal in front of the boy he saw as a little brother. He just wanted Dustin to go *away*.

"I see you're feeling better, dingus," Robin said dryly from behind the counter. "Done hanging out in the freezer to avoid work?"

“Jesus, that explains why your hands are so cold,” Dustin said with a laugh, apparently completely unconcerned.

“I work in an ice cream shop,” Steve pointed out. “Which is convenient, because he likes it cold.”

Dustin’s smile faded. “What?”

Steve watched, horrified as his hand shot out, grabbing the side of Dustin’s head, fingers clenching around curly hair before he slammed his head into the corner of the glass case. He was unconscious immediately, blood spilling from the wound as he crumpled to the ground.

Sound rushed to deafening levels in his ears for a moment as he stared down at the boy he saw as a little brother, and then it went dark, everything silent.

Steve blinked, and awareness came back to him. He stared at Dustin’s innocent expression. He was still standing in front of him, naïve to what Steve had just seen and thought was real.

“Hey, seriously, are you alright, buddy?” Dustin asked him, tilting his head. He looked like a curious puppy like that, and Steve’s heart squeezed at the memory of what he thought he had done. “You’re looking off, I see what Robin meant about you feeling sick.”

“Yes,” Steve’s mouth said. “I’m gonna go sit down for a bit – you can get an ice cream, on me. I work for the next few days, so we can catch up on the Fourth.”

Robin looked at him weirdly as he went back to the back room, and he vaguely hoped that she figured out something was off because of a promise to meet Dustin on a day when she knew he would be headed out of town, while at the same time hoping she continued on, clueless to the horrors that attacked their world.

***You are not in charge,*** the monster whispered to him in his mind, voice threatening and deep, dark with promise as he reminded him of what he’d made Steve see. ***Do not try and fight me.***

Steve was filled with so much hopelessness then that he went to the

freezer once more, immediately crumpling to sit on the ground. He wished he had enough control of his body to start crying. He wanted to just sob with the complete lack of control he had over his own self, wanted to cry until he was all dried out.

But the monster had taken that away from him, too.

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Steve was forced out from the back to go and work at the counter, both because the monster was controlling him and because Robin insisted that it was his turn to scoop ice cream and stop leaving her alone with the customers. He vaguely noted that she spent her time in the back with a tape recorder and what looked like a Russian-English dictionary, but the monster was uninterested in getting involved in that and thus Steve was kept out of the loop, too. Dustin appeared a couple more times to talk to Robin, but Steve found ways to avoid him, not wanting to actually hurt him the way the monster had threatened to do. He wasn't sure where Dustin kept going, but he didn't worry about it for the moment because that would just give the monster more ammunition, surely.

The monster seemed content for now to watch the goings-on of the people around him, and Steve felt sick with the realization that it was gathering information, for what purpose he wasn't sure but it was obviously nothing good. He wanted to see El, for her to fix him the way she'd fixed everything else with the Upside-Down, but any time he thought of her he felt a jolt of vicious intent from the monster so strong that he wanted to vomit. The monster clearly remembered her, and wanted revenge. Steve wanted the exact opposite.

It was a couple of hours till the end of his shift when a familiar figure came sauntering into the shop, and Steve's heart gave a hopeful jolt at the sight of his boyfriend. He realized with sudden ferocity that he had *missed* Billy – it had been more than twenty-four hours since he had seen him and they had been some of the worst hours of his whole life. He wanted Billy to hold him and tell him everything would be okay; he wanted him to *fix* this, to fix *him*, to find a way to free him from the hold of a maniacal, homicidal monster.

But it was when his eyes rested on Billy, on his welcoming smile

when he caught sight of him, that he was struck anew with horror as the monster inside of him perked up with clear *interest* at the sight of the boy still wearing his red swim trunks from work. The monster went delighted at what he found, both in watching Billy and in poking through Steve's mind again. Steve was pretty sure that the images that flashed through his head in that moment were plans for what the monster wanted to do to the blond, starting with taking him back to the steelworks building and possessing him the same way he had Steve. Everything that followed was worse than he had even imagined it could be, as he suddenly knew what the monster's plan was.

*No!* Steve said viciously, doing his very best to shove at the monster in his mind, but the problem was that it wasn't just his mind that it was a part of but his whole body, and it was completely impossible. *You stay away from him!*

*I am the one in charge here,* the monster snarled at him. *And that boy will be mine.*

"Hey, pretty boy," Billy greeted, approaching the counter. "You got a banana split for me?" He leered, tongue swiping over his lips meaningfully, but Steve was too terrified to pay it any attention.

*No,* his tone shifted to one of pleading, of begging. *Please, anyone but him. I won't fight, just please anyone else!*

"Hey, Steve," Billy's voice drifted to him, sounding as concerned as he looked. "You alright? Wait – is that *blood*?"

Steve's hand slapped Billy's arm away from where it was reaching to move his hair aside to see the wound from where he'd smacked it against the window in the accident the day before. Billy looked startled and slightly wounded, eyes darting around before looking back at him as Steve spoke.

"I'm fine," he said robotically. "What do you want?"

Billy looked confused and a little wary at Steve's blankness. "Just came to see how you were doing," he said in a normal voice, mindful to the other people in the shop, within earshot. "Everything go



alright at the bank?”

Steve blinked, suddenly remembering the plans he'd made with Billy for a weekend to get away. And he suddenly knew exactly how to push Billy away long enough so that he was no longer a target for the monster.

“My parents called,” he said. “They’re going to be in the cabin this weekend, after all.”

Billy blinked at him, before looking a little disappointed but like he was trying to hide it. Steve’s heart ached, but he wasn’t going to risk the monster changing its mind on claiming Billy as its own at some point – he needed to get Billy away from him until this monster was gone.

“Oh,” Billy said. “That’s alright, I’ll just come to your place, then. Maybe we can go some other time.”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea,” Steve said quickly. The monster was slithering curiously in his head. It felt cold, like trailing an ice cube over warm skin. “I’ll call you next time I’m free, yeah? I just really need to work right now to keep my dad off my ass.”

Billy peered at him carefully. “Are you sure you’re okay, Stevie?”

“Yes, Jesus, I’m *fine*,” Steve insisted. “Stop acting like a needy bitch just because I don’t want to smoke a joint with you this weekend.”

A hurt look crossed over Billy’s face before he covered it with a sneer. “Well, damn, Harrington,” he said. “I guess I’ll see you whenever your period ends.” He turned without waiting for a reply, stalking out of the shop.

Steve’s heart squeezed at the pain he’d caused Billy, but he knew it was necessary to get at least a few days away from him. He didn’t want to feel grateful to the monster, but still he couldn’t help the relieved sigh he let out as he watched Billy walk away from him, angry and hurt but at least still alive.

The monster was wiggling in the back of his mind with something akin to excitement – or maybe just anticipation – and it was so

bothersome that he almost didn't notice Robin come to stand beside him, giving him a weird look.

"What'd you and Billy Goat get into a spat about?" she asked, teasing but with an undercurrent of concern.

*Hunt, take, rip, swallow...*

Steve abruptly snatched his apron off, dropping it to the ground carelessly along with his hat. The ice cream scoop made a dull *clink* sound as it hit the tiled ground, and Steve tried not to think about how it sounded like the rattle of a chain.

"I'm going for a smoke," he said bluntly, and without waiting for her response, he disappeared to the back. He slammed the door open and walked down the dimly-lit hallway, making his way to the outside exits. It was quiet back here, only the random trucks of deliveries coming to the doors, and it was still too early for that, just barely past seven in the evening.

He leaned against the brick wall, blowing out a breath and scrubbing his hands over his eyes. For now at least, he had control of his body, but he could still feel the monster slithering in the back of his head, waiting for a reason to take over.

*He ran out of the steelworks building, looking behind him as the monster screeched and expecting at any moment for the thing to reappear again and drag him down to be eaten. It was surprising enough already that he hadn't been injured more than he was, but he wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth.*

*He scrambled to get into his car, grateful when it turned on, peeling out from the front of the building as fast as his car could take him. His eyes found a payphone on the side of the road and he pulled over with a screech of his tires, because he was still a half hour from the police station and he didn't know how long he had before the monster caught him again.*

*He didn't know what it was – it didn't look anything like the Demogorgon or the demodogs he'd dealt with before – but he knew that Hopper and El needed to know about it, because that monster meant that the gate was somehow open again and that meant they were all in danger.*

*He grabbed a handful of coins from his ashtray while in the same movement he threw the car into park and opened his door. He ran, stumbling, to the phone booth, shutting himself inside and shoving coins haphazardly into the slot, hoping that some of them were right. A moment later he heard the dial tone, and quickly punched in the numbers 9-1-1. Flo would probably pick up, and she could pass a message to Hopper as soon as she could –*

*But just as he heard the call connect, the lights flickered above him in a very sickeningly familiar way. He looked up, his heart dropping as the temperature of the air around him plummeted.*

*He should've known he wasn't completely free.*

"Hey, are you alright?"

Steve's head snapped up to see a woman watching him from a little distance away. She was probably a year or two older than him, but he didn't recognize her. Seeing the red plaid shirt and red vest that announced her as a Burger King employee, he supposed she must be from the nearby Cornwallis.

"Sorry, it's just that you look like you're about to have a breakdown," the girl said at Steve's blank stare. Her name tag said *Kimberly*. "You out of smokes, or something?"

Steve kept staring. His mind was fading; the monster was taking over again, heedless to Steve's halfhearted protests. He had delayed hurting others for as long as he could, but the monster was impatient now and the time of reckoning had come.

"Hey, you really don't look good, man," Kimberly told him, concern growing as she drew closer. "Do you have someone to give you a ride home?"

Steve's hand shot out, grabbing her around the throat. She didn't have time to struggle before he bashed her head against the brick wall of the building, and she crumpled, unconscious.

Steve didn't remember picking her up, or putting her in the trunk of his car, or driving to Brimborn Steelworks and carrying her

unconscious form inside, laying her out like an offering on the ground.

He gained some awareness though just as she began to do the same, immediately beginning to struggle and thrash around in her bonds of duct tape, eyes rolling wildly around the industrial room covered in shadows. She was terrified, tears already streaming into the dark hair at her temples, whimpers coming through the tape over her mouth as she begged him wordlessly to be let go.

His hands reached out, grabbing her by the shoulders and shoving her to the ground to get her to stop fighting, and she stilled, staring up at him with wide, wet eyes. His face was blank, but in his mind he was crying as much as Kimberly was, begging to be let out despite all the good that would do him. Begging only worked on beings who felt any pity. He knew he'd promised not to fight, if the monster left Billy alone, but faced with someone else, being forced to hurt her, he couldn't help fighting anyway. He didn't want to stop – he *needed* to try and help where he could.

He wanted to help her, wanted to help Kimberly not be so afraid. He remembered how much it had *hurt*, when the monster's clawed tentacle had attached itself to him – he didn't want that for this girl who had just been in the wrong place at the wrong time.

He leaned in close, pressing his lips near her ear.

“Don't be afraid,” he begged, but even he could hear how it came out sounding more like a threat than a reassurance, threaded with the monster's deeper voice that couldn't be comforting if it tried. Steve had the niggling thought that the monster was letting him have enough control to do this just because it was amusing to watch.

He tried infusing his words with as much comfort as he could, trying to let this girl know that he didn't want to do this, that he would *never* do this if he was in possession of his own faculties.

“It'll be over soon,” he said, because it was true – it took only a few minutes, though they felt like an eternity. “Just stay very still.”

Kimberly was panting quick breaths through her nose, clearly

fighting the urge to hyperventilate, staring unseeingly up at the ceiling as she clearly began to dissociate. Steve wanted to vomit at the thought of what she assumed he meant by his words, by his taking her there, but his face remained outwardly impassive as his hand reached out to slowly remove the duct tape from over her lips, completely in the control of the monster once again.

He rose to his feet, watching as Kimberly saw the monster, as she screamed in terror as it came to closer to her with a victorious screech. Inwardly, he was sobbing and shaking, wanting to turn away, wanting to escape, helpless to watch as the monster stole everything from this innocent girl.

But for all his sobbing, the only thing that actually escaped his body, that outwardly displayed his inner torment, was a single tear, trailing slowly down his cheek.

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Robin was annoyed that he'd ditched her the night before, two hours before his shift was supposed to end. Steve couldn't give her the real reason he'd left – that it hadn't been his choice, that he had just as well killed that girl who had only wanted to help him the night before. He just said something about feeling sick and needing to leave. Robin clearly didn't believe him, but she knew that she wasn't going to get anything else out of him and just rolled her eyes and put him on sample duty for the day as punishment. Steve was pretty sure she was just chalking up his strangeness as having to do with Billy.

He tried to stay mostly out of the way of everyone that day. The monster in his head connected him to the girl – Kimberly – and the monster was clearly adjusting to possessing someone else for the time being, content for now to leave Steve to his mediocre job slinging ice cream.

Steve would *happily* sling ice cream for the rest of his life to get rid of the monster for good.

Dustin came to the shop again, looking confused and hurt when Steve obviously avoided him, but after a couple of attempts at conversation – something about Russian spies? – he gave up and just went to the

back room to chatter to Robin. She was apparently on board with whatever he was talking about, and Steve just hoped that their distraction meant that they would be well out of the way of the shit show whenever it culminated to its worst.

In the afternoon, Billy came by to pick up Dustin; Max was with him, and he was bringing them with him to his shift at the pool. They didn't exchange any words, but Billy made eye contact with him for a moment before he turned and walked out, leaning over to say something to Dustin that Steve couldn't hear over the general noise of the mall. Steve's chest tightened as he watched them walk away, mind replaying the confused, hurt, slightly angry look on Billy's face when he'd looked at him. He just bent his head down to scoop out more samples for Erica Sinclair and her friends.

The monster controlling him seemed to get stronger as the day went on, and an itch began to rise under Steve's skin like it was antsy to find more victims. Steve realized as he began to get flashes of visions for places he didn't recognize that that was exactly the monster's plan.

He stayed later that night, closing up in an apology for leaving Robin alone to do it the day before. It hadn't been Steve's or the monster's idea – Robin had told him flat out that leaving her alone for two hours the day before could be paid back by him staying the last hour that night, where he normally would have left. Steve was just relieved that he had an excuse not to go out and attack someone for just a little while longer, and the mall was mostly empty by the time he was closing up. He still knew, instinctively, just what Kimberly was doing right then, and he ached at the now-memory (as Will called them) of her attacking her parents at the dinner table.

He had turned off most of the lights in the shop and was putting the tubs of ice cream back in the walk-in freezer for the next day when he heard footsteps outside, accompanied by the familiar jangle of a metal whistle rattling against the ring that held it to the lanyard. It was quiet enough not to be obvious, and Steve hadn't even realized that it was a familiar sound to him until he heard it right then and immediately identified – *Billy*.

He turned around just as Billy appeared in the doorway with a

familiar smile, as though the last twenty-four hours or so hadn't happened. He'd changed out of his lifeguard uniform, wearing a plain black shirt with the sleeves cut off and a pair of old jeans. Steve could tell by the volume of his hair that he hadn't gotten wet at his job that day – it still looked as put-together as ever.

“Hey,” Billy said casually. “Figured you'd be the only one left here.”

Steve inwardly stiffened against the monster's interest as he looked at his boyfriend. *Don't.*

“What are you doing here?” he asked, half himself and half monster as the words fell from his lips.

Billy shrugged, coming closer. “Got off work a little early, figured I'd come pick you up. Dustin mentioned your car was having issues. Thought you might like a lift home.”

Steve didn't know how Dustin could know that his windshield was still shattered, that the passenger side doors were dented in from where they'd hit the bushes, but he didn't stop to think about it because the very *idea* of being alone with Billy sent his pulse racing, and not in a good way.

“No, it's fine,” he brushed the offer away. “I'm just going to head home and crash. It's been a long day.”

Billy tilted his head, and then smirked a little, coming in deeper into the freezer until they were inches from each other.

“Well, maybe I can give your day a happy ending,” he murmured, and then his hands reached out, one wrapping around his forearm and the other around his waist, pulling him close enough that he could press his lips to Steve's.

Steve was surprised at the suddenness of the kiss, automatically and instinctively kissing back, before he felt the monster inside him jerk impatiently and disgustedly at the affection and he remembered that he needed to get Billy *away*.

He pulled back his head, breaking the kiss and saying, “Jesus, we're in *public*. What the hell brought this on?”

Billy smirked against the skin of his neck, tonguing at his jugular vein. “You know I love your legs in your Scoops uniform. And everyone is gone, the place is locked up; no one can hear us back here.”

Billy’s words made the monster perk up with interest, and Steve knew immediately how that sounded to the thing – no one could hear if Billy screamed, if Steve attacked him right now.

*That’s **not** what he meant*, Steve insisted, before the monster could start making active plans for bashing Billy’s head against the shelf holding ice cream beside them. *People would **definitely** hear screams.*

The monster didn’t seem dissuaded by this, not believing Steve despite the full access to his mind and memories that he had, so Steve decided to go full-tilt into distraction mode and only hope that it worked.

He forced a moan past his throat as Billy continued to kiss down the line of his jaw, despite the complete lack of arousal he felt right then. He didn’t want Billy to stop. If he stopped, the monster might lose interest, might decide to add Billy to his growing collection of puppets headed to their deaths.

“That’s right, princess,” Billy breathed, pushing Steve back farther until his back hit the shelves, hand snaking its way under his shirt to splay against the small of his back, urging him closer even as Steve’s hands clutched at Billy’s hair, keeping his focus on his neck. “You like this, huh? Gonna stop being the bitch you’ve been for the past day, or ‘m I gonna have to fuck it out of you?”

The wording was strange, for Billy. He had been known to engage in and enjoy dirty talk before, but not like this. Not with this condescending tone, with the way that he phrased his suggestion, like he was the usual person topping. (Which wasn’t to say he *never* did, but...not like this.)

But at the moment, Steve didn’t care enough to dwell on it. He’d let Billy fuck him, he’d let him do whatever he wanted to him – and that was even without the desperate desire to keep him safe from Steve himself.



So he moaned, and tipped his head back further as Billy nipped at the spot where his neck met his shoulder. Within him, the monster watched curiously, with a faint thread of disgust but not enough to keep him from watching for now to see what would happen. Steve felt a bit like a bug under a microscope as the monster used his memories to shift against Billy and moan like he enjoyed it so that the thing could see how Billy would react this time – how *Steve* would react in his mind and with his body.

Billy's teeth fastened around a small bit of skin on his neck, and it stung and ached – and then at the same time, there was a much sharper pinch on the other side of his neck, like he'd been stabbed with a tack or something. He startled a little –

And then Billy was backing away quickly, expression completely open without a shred of arousal to be seen, only fear and worry and determination.

It was then that his vision began to blur, and Billy's expression faded with it, and Steve's eyes wandered down to see a hypodermic needle held loosely in Billy's fingers.

Abruptly he was filled with a foreign fury, the fury of the monster possessing him as it suddenly wrenched itself inside for control again, as though that could stop this from happening.

“What did you do?” Steve's voice said, but it wasn't his voice, not really. It was deep and dark and threatening, a promise of violence laced through every tone and decibel. He stumbled on legs that were going numb, clumsy hands reaching toward Billy to try and attack him.

“Sorry, baby,” Billy breathed, his voice slightly distorted as Steve's vision began to go fuzzy.

But *Steve* wasn't angry, or hurt, or anything except endlessly relieved and *triumphant*, because Billy had tricked the monster into letting its guard down, had clearly known something was up and come here to take care of it without regard to his own safety.

He felt the roar of the monster shake through him, felt it like it was

beside him and splitting his eardrums rather than everything being all in his head. A moment before he passed out completely, he felt himself falling, felt Billy's familiar hands catch him and keep him from hitting the ground.

And then it went dark.

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When Billy showed up at the pool, all the kids were waiting for him, but Billy couldn't even be too upset about it, because the kids would be a help, for as much as he wanted to keep them out of harm's way.

"Shit, is he really possessed?" were the words that Mike greeted him with as soon as Billy came walking in through the front door with his boyfriend's unconscious form slung over his shoulder.

Billy didn't bother answering his question – he wouldn't have stuck him with the needle if he wasn't at least fifty percent sure. After hearing the monster's voice through Steve's mouth, he had no doubts. "Have you got the chains?"

"We got them – they're in the locker room," Lucas reported, following alongside him as they walked through the empty pool facilities. Will followed on the other side, watching their beloved babysitter with wide, grim eyes.

"Max found some metal pipes that we can heat up too, if we need that," Dustin said solemnly. "Will said that it didn't get out of him until Nancy shoved the fire poker in his side."

Billy nodded wordlessly in acknowledgement, hoping that the sauna would be enough so that Steve wouldn't have to be scarred from this. El was there too, which would hopefully mean that she could help get the Flayer out of Steve without having to subject him to the painful heat for so long.

As he carried Steve's limp body to the sauna at the back of the locker room, he reflected on how he had come to be here, the events that had led to drugging his boyfriend and taking him to his place of work so that he and a bunch of kids could burn an evil monster from

another dimension out of said boyfriend's mind and body.

It had started with Dustin.

Earlier that day, he had gone to pick up Dustin from the mall before work, because he hadn't seen him since he came back from camp on Saturday and he figured they could catch up on the way to the pool. Max had come with him, a bit skittish but not like Neil had done anything the night before, and at first he hadn't paid it any mind.

But then he had found Dustin at Scoops Ahoy – which, he really should have expected, considering how close Steve and Dustin were, but he'd had to see Steve after the...*whatever* it was that had happened the night before, and he didn't like that so much. The worst part was that Steve didn't even look bothered when they made eye contact, but seemed to almost stare right through him, eyes seeming darker than normal. Billy had looked away to ask Dustin about camp as they had walked back to the parking lot.

“Yeah, yeah, it was fine,” Dustin had dismissed. “Listen, I think something is wrong with Steve. Has he done or said anything weird recently?”

And Billy hadn't wanted to talk about the spat, still not sure what it was he'd done to upset Steve but not wanting to share the recent developments with Dustin.

But then Max spoke before he even had the chance to come up with something noncommittal, bursting out with, “El saw something!” Then she'd looked around quickly, eyes darting about to make sure that no one was paying attention to them or had heard her outburst.

Once they'd gotten back to the relative privacy of the Camaro, Max had told them how the night before, she and El were messing around, and they decided to spy on Steve through the Void, knowing that he would be at work. Billy had wanted to scold them for it, because not only was that a massive breach in privacy, but Steve could've been doing *anything* the night before that no kids should ever have to see – but then Max started talking about how El had seen Steve in the Void, wearing his Scoops uniform but clearly not at work. There had been someone crying in front of him – a woman that El couldn't see,

on the ground, with Steve crouched over her. She'd started screaming, and then Steve had turned around suddenly and *seen* El, despite the fact that that shouldn't have been possible, with her in the Void – and then he disappeared in wisps of smoke a moment later, along with the mystery woman. But, Max told them, El said that Steve didn't *look* like Steve – it was like there was nothing there but a body.

"I told her it might've been – *happy* screams," Max told them uncomfortably, not looking at Billy, "So we shouldn't say anything unless we knew for sure."

"Steve wouldn't cheat on me," Billy had told her, lips numb, trying to believe his own words, but all his old doubts and insecurities came up and he couldn't quite convince himself.

Thankfully, it was Dustin who spoke up, visibly upset. "Of course he wouldn't!" he declared definitively. "He's *super* faithful. Which means something *weird* is going on!"

And Billy had clung to Dustin's surety, and rather than taking Dustin and Max to the pool he had gone to Steve's house, getting in with his key and going searching through his room and bathroom. He hadn't been there the night before, not wanting to see Steve after their spat and face the possibility of being kicked out, but he hoped that Steve had been there to leave clues or something as to what he had been doing with the woman El had seen.

It was in the trash can in the bathroom that they found their first and only piece of evidence that something was *seriously* wrong – a red scrunchie, browned with dried blood.

Billy had stared down at it, and then said, "We need to get the rest of the kids."

When they had seen the rest of the kids, Will had admitted to them that he thought the Mind Flayer was back, but he hadn't said anything for fear that it was just PTSD and they would dismiss it. With this information about Steve acting strangely, they were pretty sure it had found a host in him. Billy had gone cold at the practical confirmation that Steve was possessed by the thing, but when Dustin

commented that Robin had said Steve was hanging out in the ice cream freezer a lot, it was practically confirmed. Steve didn't like the cold. But the Mind Flayer did.

From there they had formed a plan – Billy would go in and distract Steve, and give him a shot from a sedative that they hadn't used back in November for Will (which Billy didn't even *want* to know why it hadn't been thrown out since then), and they would take him to the sauna at the pool to try and burn the monster out of him like they had for Will. El would be there for backup, to use her powers to try to get it out of him, and Billy hated that she had to face the monster again while he was also grateful to have someone there to help with Steve.

He hadn't wanted the other kids to be there, because they would just get in the way or make themselves targets to the monster, but now that they *were* there, watching as Billy wrapped heavy chains around his boyfriend to keep the monstrous part of him contained when he woke up, he figured it would be pointless anyway to try to get them to leave. He wasn't the only one who cared about Steve, after all.

Billy blew out a breath as he snapped the heavy duty lock into place around the chains that kept Steve's arms bound at his sides. The chains had been his idea; he figured they would conduct heat faster and more directly than the sauna would, and might get the monster out of him faster. He had to keep replaying the mental image of Steve earlier that night, snarling at him when he'd realized what Billy had done, sticking him with the needle – otherwise he was going to just call himself crazy and let him go.

He left Steve on the floor of the sauna, still unconscious, and chained the door shut and locked tight with a metal pole through the handle for added security, before nodding to Will to crank up the heat past safe levels.

It was tense for several long moments, silent but for the hissing of the heat and steam rising on the other side of the closed door. The kids stayed back, not so much for safety but because there was only room for one person to look through the window at a time, and Billy had already taken that spot.

And then Billy watched as Steve twitched, and then came awake with a gasp that ended in a choking cough.

“What the – *fuck*...” Steve stammered, eyes darting about as he took in the chains keeping him bound, at the steam billowing about the room, and finally at Billy staring at him through the small window. “Billy – *what*...?”

“Get the hell out of my boyfriend,” Billy said stonily, knowing (hoping) that they were right, that Steve was possessed by the Mind Flayer. “We’ll keep you here all night if we have to, to force you out.”

“We’?” Steve questioned, moving his head from side to side like he was trying to get rid of a crick in his neck. “Billy, why are you...?”

“I know you’re not really Steve,” Billy insisted. “So save us all the time and just *leave*.”

“No – I *am* Steve,” Steve insisted, wiggling a bit, hissing as the hot metal of the chains cut into his arms with his struggles. He struggled to his knees, and Billy had the fleeting thought that he should’ve bound his legs in chains, too. “Billy, what the fuck, get me *out* of here!”

“I can’t feel anything,” Will muttered behind him, but Billy didn’t let himself doubt. He had heard Steve’s voice go deep, in the freezer, had seen the fury when he’d realized he’d been stuck with a needle full of a drug to knock him out. He knew that *Steve* wouldn’t look at him like that, no matter what he might have done.

“Let my friend go,” El piped in, scooting in front of Billy, expression hard as she looked through the window, at Steve getting shakily to his feet.

“El...” Steve breathed, and then abruptly his face crumpled, his whole body going limp, sitting heavily on the seat against the far wall. “I’m sorry, please believe me, I didn’t mean to do it – he made me do it!”

“What did he make you do?” Dustin asked, voice tremulous as he looked hopefully through the window, pushing El aside. Billy stood

just behind him, watching Steve, heart cracking at the pain on his face and not sure what was real or not.

“I didn’t *want* to,” Steve sobbed, shaking his head from side to side, head hanging like he couldn’t bear to look at them. He slid to the ground again, curling up against the tiles and hiding his face against his knees. “He *made* me hurt her – you *have* to believe me, please!”

“We believe you, Steve, you just have to talk to us,” Dustin assured him. “You remember when Will was possessed? You’ve just gotta help us out, buddy.”

“We’re at two-twenty,” Mike reported, looking at the thermometer uneasily.

Steve’s sobs grew, his chest shuddering, and he cried out anew as the temperature rose and the steam increased. “Please, please – it burns! Let me out – let me *out*!”

Billy’s expression hardened at his words, hearing the Mind Flayer’s insistence underneath Steve’s tone.

“Nice try,” he drawled, affecting like he wasn’t bothered at all by the sight of his boyfriend in such pain, when he would in fact give everything to trade places with Steve, to take his pain for himself. “Gonna have to try better than that to fool any of us. We *know* you, remember?”

It was like Steve didn’t hear him, still shaking his head and shuddering with his sobs, but he stopped pleading, like he’d given up. Billy ignored the thread of doubt snaking its way through him, because Steve might be in pain, but he wasn’t going to *die* by being in the sauna too long. Maybe be hospitalized, but that would be a small price to pay in comparison to what *could* happen. And if Steve was at all aware of what was going on, then Billy was certain that Steve would want them to continue until the motherfucker was *gone*.

Then Will whispered suddenly behind them, voice full of dread, “He’s activated.”

And then the sobs shut off abruptly, and Steve stretched out from his

previously curled position on the ground, sitting up with his legs bent in front of him, looking up at them through the window with burning eyes full of hate, lips pulled back in a sneer.

“This will do *nothing*,” he promised, voice dark like Steve’s wasn’t, and everyone stiffened to attention, whether they could see him or not. “This flesh sack is *weak*, so we are restricted for now. But wait until you see what we are *building* for you.”

Billy realized then that Steve wasn’t looking at him, but at El, who had retaken her place in front of him, Dustin off to the side. He grabbed her by the shoulder, shoving her behind him so that the monster couldn’t see her through the window anymore.

“You won’t be building *anything* with Steve,” Billy snarled at the thing, who looked up at him with amusement. “Get *out*!”

Steve’s face stretched into a grin – too big, too unnatural, too thin – and black began to snake along his veins, bringing them out in stark relief against his face, his arms, his legs. He looked like a disease brought to life.

“No,” Steve said, and his eyes went black, the lights flashing like a strobe light around them.

The kids let out a shriek as Billy threw himself backwards at them, as though his arms would shield them from Steve suddenly getting to his feet and throwing himself at the door to the sauna.

“Open the door!” Steve thundered, voice deep with the Mind Flayer’s voice taking over. “Open the *goddamn door*!” He backed up again, and took a running leap at the door, trying to force it open once again.

“Go to hell!” Billy snarled, despite the very real fear that the monster would be able to open that door. The pipe was already bending where it held the door locked in case the chains and padlock didn’t work.

“I’m going to kill you!” the monster screamed, Steve’s eyes burning right into El’s, expression twisted with such a foreign hate on those



normally affable features that it made Billy sick. “I’m going to fucking *gut* you, you little bitch!”

“*Out*,” El said furiously, and then her hand shot out, and Billy thought for a moment that she was going to throw him back against the opposite wall, but then Steve gave an abrupt scream and fell to the ground, out of sight. El stepped forward quickly, Billy just behind her, looking down through the window at Steve curled up on the ground.

Billy choked at the sight of the chains they’d used to bind him, glowing a deep red where they wrapped around pale arms riddled with blackened veins. He tried to tell himself that the steam he saw was from the sauna, from the water that pumped inside, rather than Steve’s flesh burning beneath the chains.

“Hot hot *hot*!” Steve screamed, thrashing mindlessly against the ground. “Let me *out*!”

“Get out yourself!” Will was the one to yell.

Steve abruptly convulsed and choked, screams cutting off long enough for him to vomit what looked like a blackened sludge surrounded by dirty water.

“It’s out – kid, it’s out! Stop, it *hurts*!” Steve yelled then on a sob, and Billy wondered for an *instant* –

But his tone wasn’t right still, the lights were still flashing around them, and he could see black veins still through the steam.

So he put a hand on El’s shoulder, encouraging her, and said through a voice full of gravel, “Burn the son of a bitch.”

The chains went brighter as the heat increased, shining through the thick steam on the other side of the window, and Billy forced himself to watch as Steve screamed, his voice going higher pitched by the moment as he ground his forehead against the tiled ground, unable to comprehend the amount of pain he was in. El shrieked as her other hand came up, blood pouring from both nostrils, and Steve threw himself onto his back before black smoke *poured* out of him. It came

to the window, flying through with enough force to break it, and Billy yanked himself and El back before it or the glass shards could hurt either of them, and it went to the wall, flying through with an explosion of bricks before disappearing into the night sky.

El dropped her hands, eyes wet as she stared through the now broken window at Steve's softly crying form inside the sauna, the chains back to normal and no longer burning him. Will hurried to shut off the sauna, and Billy grabbed the pipe keeping the door closed and then unlocked the padlock, yanking the door open and dropping to his knees in front of Steve's limp form, heedless to the monster goo that Steve had thrown up soaking into his jeans, or the steam that billowed out so quickly he could hardly see the brunette.

"I'm sorry," Steve hiccupped, face streaked with tears that still continued to flow as Billy undid the chains around him with shaking hands. "Billy, *I'm sorry.*"

"Shh, shh," Billy hushed him, gathering him up in his arms. "*None* of this is your fault, okay? Shh, you're okay now." Steve winced as Billy brushed against the burns caused by the chains, and Billy almost pulled back, not wanting to cause him further pain, but Steve just clutched at him tighter when it seemed like he was going to leave, and he capitulated immediately, hand going to the back of Steve's head to press him close into his shoulder, pressing a relieved kiss into his hair.

"How the hell did the monster even come back?" Lucas muttered to Dustin in an aside. "El closed the Gate, didn't she?"

"I have a theory about that," Dustin said, and all eyes turned to him, save for Steve and Billy, who were still wrapped up in each other. "Long story, but it might have to do with some Russians under the mall."

Will shook his head, not disbelievingly, but tiredly, as he looked out at the night sky on the other side of the destroyed wall.

"The monster is still out there," he said what they were all thinking. "And I'm sure this has only pissed him off more."

“We will get rid of him forever this time,” El said, expression determined from where she sat in Mike’s arms, an echo of the pose adopted by Billy and Steve as she exhaustedly tried to recover from the amount of power she’d used to force the Mind Flayer out from Steve. “He hurt my *friends*. This time, we’ll *kill* him.”

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The creature known to the kids as the “Mind Flayer” intended to fly back to the place of its creation, to its sanctuary – the place known as Brimborn Steelworks. It needed to check on the other puppets, the other humans waiting to be absorbed into its physical body. Without a human body to act as host, it wasn’t connected so deeply to their minds, and couldn’t risk anything going wrong now without that control.

It didn’t get as far as the steelworks, though.

Before reaching the building, it heard the loud motor of a pickup truck driving down the otherwise quiet road. It recognized the sound, despite never having heard it itself – but it was a familiar sound in the memories it had stolen from the humans. One human in particular *hated* the sound that the monster heard then – a normal loud motor of an older pickup truck, but with a little rattle in the engine that identified it as belonging to one person in particular.

Without this familiarity, without the memory of the *hate* and the *dread* that always arose at this sound, the creature might not have stopped. It was just the sound of another human vehicle, after all, lost among the myriad of other sounds that humans made with themselves or with their machines.

But it *was* familiar, and the horrible feelings that accompanied that sound were like a comfort, if creatures such as he were prone to desiring things like comfort. So the creature – smoke, for now, until it could reach a host – swooped down to the truck.

A tug at one of the hosts, an impression to the mind, and the truck ran into a tree. The driver came stumbling out, and the creature slammed into him, pouring into every orifice that allowed him so willingly inside.

Yes, the creature thought to itself, poking around the human's mind and settling in comfortably there. There was already so much hate and resentment in this human that it was hard to tell where the human ended and the creature from the Upside Down began. The fit was much more comfortable than the previous ones had been – there was none of that wretched *love* or *hope* here to risk it being burned out.

This new host would do nicely.

### **Author's Note:**

I was going to make Steve attack Robin at work, and I even had a plan for getting her out of it (because no way in hell am I killing any of my faves), but then I realized that I still needed her for the Russian plot, and so I left her to be the one to help Dustin with it all where Steve is keeping his distance. I realize I never showed them meeting or how they know each other enough now to be this comfortable without Steve or Billy as the connecting buffer between them, but I'll just leave that to your imagination. ;)